

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, GENERAL WARD 70
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Building No.
1188)
(Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center)
(Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center)
7601 Imperial Avenue; at intersection of Erika Avenue and Bonita
Street
Downey
Los Angeles County
California

HABS CA-2800-H
HABS CA-2800-H

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, GENERAL WARD 70 (Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles Building No. 1188) Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center

HABS No. CA-2800-H

Location: 7601 Imperial Highway. One of a row of five nearly identical buildings, General Wards 30–70, General Ward 70 (LACO No. 1188) is located directly southwest of the intersection of Erickson Avenue and Bonita Street. The other four General Wards (30–60) are located northwest of the same intersection.

U.S. Geological Survey Los Angeles Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 3754093 N; 392430.1 E

**Present Owner /
Occupant:** County of Los Angeles

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: General Ward 70 is significant under National Register of Historic Places Criterion A for its association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history. Reflecting the prosperity and population growth of Los Angeles County during the early decades of the twentieth century and the need for additional space to address the overflow of patients from Los Angeles County Hospital, General Wards 30–70 were constructed at the Los Angeles County Poor Farm from 1913 to 1928. As the last of the General Wards to be built, General Ward 70 (circa 1928) is representative of a large building effort at the Los Angeles County Poor Farm that occurred in response to a 1923 Los Angeles County bond issue and allotted \$500,000 for improvements and additional buildings at the County Poor Farm. These funds supported numerous construction projects from 1924 to 1929 at the Los Angeles County Poor Farm. Nearly identical to its predecessors, General Wards 30–60, the documentation of General Ward 70 is representative of all the general ward buildings. The General Ward buildings continued to function as wards until their conversion in the late twentieth century to office and storage space.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. **Date of erection:** 1928 (The five general ward buildings, General Wards 30–70, were built between 1913 and 1928)¹
2. **Architect:** Karl W. Muck, County Architect, Department of the County Architect

¹ According to historic aerial photographs and Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. Centennial. Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888-1988. Downey, California: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

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3. **Original and subsequent owners:** County of Los Angeles (1887/1888–present)
4. **Original and subsequent occupants:** County of Los Angeles (1887/1888–present)
5. **Builder, contractor, suppliers:** No known builder, contractor, or supplier could be associated with General Ward 70.
6. **Original plans and construction:** An incomplete set of original architectural drawings for the general ward buildings are on file with the County of Los Angeles.
7. **Alterations and additions:** Alterations as they appear from historic photographs include the enclosure of original screened porch areas with wood-framed double-hung windows, the sealing of original window and door openings, and the replacement of original wood doors with metal doors.

B. Historic Context:

General Ward 70

Begun in 1887/1888 as the new County Poor Farm, Rancho Los Amigos upon its inception was a rehabilitation facility that provided work, housing, and medical care to the indigent. The original purchase of 124.4 acres in the vicinity of the town of Downey, founded in 1873, was graded for roads, supplied with water from an artesian well, and improved with a Refectory Building (Dining Hall), the North and South Wards, an aviary, and an Office Building by 1889. During the following decade, barns and ancillary buildings with agricultural functions, a freight and passenger railroad depot, a combined bathhouse and laundry facility, and an additional ward were added.

By the 1890s, the County Poor Farm's livestock and agricultural operations were self-sufficient. The County Poor Farm had a herd of nearly 100 Jersey and Holstein cows, which provided a daily output of 200 gallons of milk. For eggs, the farm relied upon its productive, 800-chicken poultry farm located east of Erickson Avenue and north of Gardendale Street. East of the poultry yard was a hog farm, which supported approximately 150 Berkshire and Poland hogs. Sheep were raised and used for their wool. Percheron draft horses were kept to assist with heavy labor tasks. A wide range of crops were grown at the County Poor Farm, including fruits such as strawberries, peaches, and pears, and vegetables such as cabbage, corn, celery, onions, radishes, sugar beets, peas, cucumbers, and olives. With the assistance of farm supervisors, able-bodied patients helped work the fields and orchards, for which they received compensation of \$1.50 per day. Irrigation was provided primarily by the farm's artesian well. Water from the well was pumped using a 10-horse power engine and stored in a water tower.²

² Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

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The County Poor Farm grew into a nationally recognized institution in the fields of cultivation and scientific breeding as a producer of prized crops and livestock. In addition to operating a successful agricultural enterprise, the County Poor Farm gradually expanded its role as a County medical facility. An increasing number of inmates with chronic medical disorders were being admitted to the County Poor Farm during the 1910s, prompting administrators to employ a staff of physicians and nurses to treat them. This surge in patients, and subsequently employees, would create the impetus for expanded development at the County Poor Farm in ensuing decades. The influx of new patients at the County Poor Farm provided the impetus for the expansion of services and facilities needed, resulting in the construction of a number of buildings at the property. The County Poor Farm's expansion reflected an important shift as the focus of the facility transitioned from rehabilitative care for indigents into a hospital to house long-term invalid patients.

In June 1915, William Ruddy Harriman was appointed the new superintendent at the County Poor Farm in order to reestablish the facility after devastating floods and a hog cholera epidemic in 1914 damaged the property's agricultural enterprises. Harriman promptly moved his family into the new Craftsman residence that had been constructed by the prior County Poor Farm superintendent, Charles C. Manning, at the center of the property. When Harriman took over management responsibilities at the County Poor Farm, the institution was providing care to 500 indigent men and women with a staff of 45. Under Harriman's leadership (1915–1931, 1933–1952), the County Poor Farm's agricultural fields and livestock rebounded and an ambitious plan of improvements, including new and expanded wards, was immediately begun to address the rapidly expanding need for patient accommodations and services. Harriman dramatically improved the property, installing an irrigation system, upgrading the utilities, constructing new buildings, organizing administration duties and developing the property's park-like landscape. These improvements were largely accomplished in the wake of the financial surge following World War I.³

The range of improvements Harriman initiated at the County Poor Farm reflects the rapid growth of the facility during the 1920s. New and expanded services included the construction of new on-site housing that was provided for the employees responsible for around-the-clock patient care and attention, patient wards, additions to men and women's psychopathic buildings, dining room extensions, nurses' dormitories, employee bungalows, a new power plant, and street improvements.

In addition to the physical changes that were implemented under Harriman's leadership, there were also philosophical changes at the County Poor Farm. Harriman subscribed to the idea that the physical condition of an individual could be improved through occupational therapy activities and uplifting surroundings.

³ Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

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Harriman's philosophy for self-improvement soon encompassed every activity at the County Poor Farm. He insisted that the patient's needs and comfort be addressed through the development of amenities at the County Poor Farm. Patients were assigned to work on the farm or in the greenhouse, based on their physical capabilities and individual talents. These occupational therapy activities were also intended as physical therapy, by providing the patients with fresh air, sunshine and independence.⁴

Throughout the 1920s, as residency continued to increase, Harriman expanded and improved the County Poor Farm's facilities, including a number of large building projects. Understanding the need to house additional patients, Harriman began the construction of four patient wards in 1922 followed by an additional four wards soon after. This project signaled the full-fledged transition of the farm from a rehabilitative care facility for indigents into a hospital to house long-term invalid patients. By 1922, the institution had a staff of approximately 175 employees to care for the needs of the 1,500 ambulatory patients living at the South Campus.⁵ By late 1925, an additional five infirmary wards had been constructed. Several substantial buildings continued to be erected through the 1920s. In 1928, the old brick refectory building was razed and replaced with an 850-seat Spanish Colonial Revival Auditorium which provided much needed diversions to the ailing patients and staff. Movies were screened weekly in the Auditorium and other musical types of entertainment were offered as well.

By the end of the 1920s, the County Poor Farm comprised an impressive 540 acres of farmland and buildings, with a property value of \$2 million dollars. Real estate improvements included 3 annual crop yields, 1 mile of paved roads, an additional 1 ¼ miles of decomposing granite roads, miles of sewer mains connected to the County sanitation system, hundreds of acres of new lawns, gardens, trees, and numerous buildings serving a variety of purposes.^{6,7}

PART II. ARCHITECTURE INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. **Architectural character:** General Ward 70, designed in the Stripped Classicism style, is two stories in height with a rectangular plan and an asymmetrical east-facing facade. A two-story staircase corridor and second-floor enclosed balcony are located on both the east-facing facade and west elevation. A concrete loading dock is located on the west elevation (rear) of the building which supports a one-story

⁴ Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

⁵ Foster, Henry. 5 October 1959. "History of the Rancho." Los Angeles: University of Southern California Archives. Box 25, Folder 57.

⁶ Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

⁷ Harriman, William R. "1927–1928 Annual Report for Rancho Los Amigos." Los Angeles: University of Southern California. Box 22, Folder 13.

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enclosed projecting addition with a shed roof. The building has retained most of its character-defining features, which reflect the Stripped Classicism style, which includes the vertical division of the exterior walls into two-story segmentally arched bays by plain raised piers, and the horizontal division of the exterior into three parts by a simple cornice topped by a parapet and raised wall base.

2. **Condition of fabric:** The current condition of General Ward 70 is deteriorated. The building's doors and windows are boarded over.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. **Overall dimensions:** The net interior condition space of General Ward 70, interior dimensions exclusive of covered or enclosed exterior spaces, calculates to 13,995 square feet. The building has a gross area of exterior square footage of 14,644 square feet and a footprint of 7,923 square feet.⁸
2. **Foundations:** The building sits on a concrete foundation.
3. **Walls:** The exterior walls are constructed of reinforced concrete covered in textured stucco and painted. The walls are divided on all elevations by a continuous blind arcade which is pierced by bands of windows and doors. The arcade divides the east-facing facade and west elevation (rear) into two bays by a central pier, and divides the north and south elevations into ten bays by multiple piers.
4. **Structural system, framing:** The structural system for General Ward 70 consists of a flat roof supported by reinforced concrete exterior walls with slab and stem walls.
5. **Openings:**
 - a. **Windows:** The openings on General Ward 70 are arranged in an asymmetrical and linear arrangement. The windows can generally be described as a linear fenestration pattern of original, wood-framed windows of various sizes wrapping around the entire building which include (where extant): bands of four one-over-one, double-hung wood sash windows with transoms; single one-over-one, double-hung wood sash windows with transoms; and double one-over-one-light double-hung wood sash windows. All of the windows are placed in slightly recessed openings and are flat-headed. The windows are trimmed with troweled, smooth, raised, concrete window sills.

⁸ Sapphos Environmental, Inc. 15 December 2008. Revised Memorandum for the Record, 1217-056, No. 21, Update to the List of Buildings, Structures, and Features of the Rancho Los Amigos Historic District. Pasadena, CA.

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- b. **Doors:** The primary entrances are located on the east and west sides of the north and south elevations by way of a staircase corridor. Additional entrances are located centrally on the north and south elevations, as well as a central west (rear) elevation entrance. Original extant wood doors include single and double veneered and glazed doors with and without transoms. A large metal rollup loading door is located centrally on the west elevation (rear). Non-original metal doors are located throughout the building.

6. **Roof:**

The building is surmounted by a flat, rectangular-massed, monitor roof, constructed of composite material, which is wrapped in a continuous linear band of metal, louvered vents running the length of the building. At the top of the wall plate, the building has a projecting concrete parapet covered in textured stucco which wraps around the building, enclosing the roof from street view.

- C. **Description of Interior:** The first floor consists of four large rooms at each corner of the floor plan. A set of men's and women's bathrooms are located centrally on the south and north ends of the building, while two smaller rooms are located centrally and two additional rooms are anchored at the southwest corners of the building. The primary entrance to each of the larger rooms is located through the west and east stairwells. The second floor has a similar arrangement with four larger rooms centrally divided by two sets of men's and women's restrooms. Centrally located on the second story floor plan are four smaller rooms that appear as lobby areas that connect the two south rooms and north rooms with their respective bathrooms.

D. **Site:**

1. **General setting:** Existing landscaping surrounding the building consists of a spare amount of mature shrubs and grass. Concrete sidewalks surround the building on all sides, and concrete ramps are located on the building's north and south elevations.
2. **Orientation:** The east-facing General Ward 70 is located directly southwest of the intersection of Erickson Avenue and Bonita Street. Four additional general ward buildings are located northwest of the same intersection.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. **Architectural Drawings:**

An incomplete set of drawings for the general ward buildings, prepared by the County of Los Angeles Mechanical Department, are located on file with the County of Los Angeles. A set of as-found drawings were prepared for the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) documentation in 2007 by Mollenhauer Group for the County of Los Angeles.

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C. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

Rancho Los Amigos Foundation collection

D. Supplemental Material:

Reduced copies of an incomplete set of original architectural drawings
Reduced copies of 2007 as-found drawings
Photo Key

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

HABS documentation for General Ward 70 was prepared by Sapphos Environmental, Inc. staff from December 2006 to June 2010 on behalf of the County of Los Angeles Chief Executive Office (CEO). The HABS documentation serves as mitigation to comply with the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the proposed Campus Plan project. Measured surveys were carried out in 2007 by Mollenhauer Group, Los Angeles, California. Photographs were taken from January to June 2010 by Mr. David Lee, production manager, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Part I of the historical report (historic context) was prepared by Ms. Shannon Carmack, senior cultural resources coordinator; Ms. Rebecca Silva, senior cultural resources coordinator; Ms. Deborah Howell-Ardila, senior cultural resources coordinator; Ms. Marlise Fratinardo, senior cultural resources coordinator; and Ms. Laura Carias, cultural resources coordinator, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Part II of the historical report (architectural information) was prepared by Ms. Rebecca Silva, senior cultural resources coordinator; Ms. Marlise Fratinardo, senior cultural resources coordinator; and Ms. Laura Carias, cultural resources coordinator, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Ms. Leslie Heumann, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. manager of cultural resources, reviewed the final report and supporting documents and provided research, writing, and project oversight.